

# From Cultural Deprivation to Individual Deficits: A Genealogy of Deficiency in Inuit Adult Education

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## Abstract

Adult education programs are often grounded in problematic assumptions about learners' inadequacies. The purpose of this article is to critique such assumptions through presenting a history of the manner in which representatives of Canadian governments conceptualized the education of Inuit adults from the 1940s through the 1980s. Using genealogical methods and archival data, I find three stages in the evolution of official discourses about Inuit adult education: exclusion, cultural deprivation, and individualization. This article contributes to the history of Inuit education, and to the critique of deficiency discourses as more broadly deployed in the education of adults from marginalized backgrounds.

*Keywords:* Inuit, adult education, Canada, history of education, official discourses

## Résumé

L'éducation des adultes est souvent fondée sur des hypothèses problématiques à propos des insuffisances des apprenants. Le but de cet article est de critiquer ces hypothèses en présentant un historique de la façon dont les représentants des gouvernements canadiens ont conceptualisé l'éducation des Inuits à partir des années 1940 jusqu'aux années 80. À l'aide de méthodes généalogiques et de données d'archives, je vois trois phases dans l'évolution de discours officiel sur l'éducation adulte chez les Inuit: l'exclusion; la privation culturelle; et l'individualisation. Cet article contribue à l'histoire de l'éducation des Inuits, et à la critique des discours d'insuffisance comme déployées dans l'éducation des adultes provenant des groupes marginalisés.

*Mots-clés :* Les Inuits, l'éducation des adultes, Canada, l'histoire de l'éducation, les discours officiels

## Introduction

Over the past century, the engagement of the Canadian state in Inuit education has changed dramatically. In 1919, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Duncan Scott, succinctly expressed the official disinterest of the Canadian government in the education of its most northerly citizens: “As yet no very large financial aid has been allocated for the education of the Eskimos. The establishment of schools has been left to those interested in the evangelization of the people” (Public Archives of Canada, RG 85, v. 1130, f. 254-1, pt. 1). In contrast, by 2016 the Department of Education of the Government of Nunavut had expressed the following ambitious goal as part of its vision statement:

We aim for our high school graduation rates to be on par with the rest of Canada and for the majority of Nunavut youth to graduate from high school, college or university, and with the same level of skills, knowledge and abilities as graduates from anywhere in Canada. (<http://gov.nu.ca/education>)

Within the history of Inuit education, this article focuses upon the evolution of official discourses about the education of Inuit adults. I employ genealogical methods (Foucault, 1980, 1984) to interpret archival data, exploring how representatives of Canadian governments thought about the education of Inuit adults from the 1940s through the 1980s.

While the empirical focus of this article is restricted to a particular time and place, its scholarly and political implications should be of interest to those engaged in the study or practice of adult education far beyond the Arctic. My genealogy reveals three key stages in the evolution of official discourses: exclusion (adult education as irrelevant for Inuit); cultural deprivation (adult education as a means for Inuit to overcome their collective deficiencies and thrive in the modern world); and the individualization of inadequacy (adult education as a means to meet the inherent learning needs of modern individuals). These stages are consistent with the evolution of discourses deployed in connection with adult education programs targeting a range of marginalized populations. Collective notions of deficiency were used to legitimate adult education activities in initiatives as diverse as those of the Harlem Renaissance and the Workers’ Educational Association. Individualized notions of deficiency have been influential in recent decades, legitimating various forms of adult education, including those relating to literacy and vocational

training. Assumptions about the inadequacies of learners constitute some of the most politically and pedagogically challenging aspects of adult education.

In this article, I construct a detailed, historical account of the deployment and evolution of deficiency discourses. The next section of the article locates my study of Inuit adult education within a much broader history of the use of claims regarding collective and individual inadequacies to justify and orient adult education programs. Following this literature review, I describe my research methods—both in terms of my data collection strategies, and in terms of my analytical approach. To set this study in an empirical context, I then outline the historical evolution of Euro-Canadian colonization of the Inuit, with an emphasis on the evolution of adult educational structures and institutions. The main body of the article presents a history of the discourses through which representatives of Canadian governments conceptualized the education of Inuit adults. To demonstrate that the history of official discourses concerning Inuit adult education in Canada was not a teleological unfolding of truth, but rather a contested and political process, I introduce various criticisms of official discourses, and explain the political-economic and strategic variables that shaped the work of state representatives. In the conclusion, I argue that this article both contributes to the history of Inuit education in Canada (McGregor, 2013), and offers important insight for understanding and contesting the deployment of deficiency discourses in the education of adults from other, marginalized backgrounds.

## Literature Review

It is important to recognize that those responsible for the education of Inuit adults were not alone in positioning their work within discourses of inadequacy. Belzer and Pickard (2015) highlighted the prevalence of deficiency logic in adult education by creating, based on a review of over 70 qualitative studies, a typology of ways in which researchers have characterized adult literacy learners. Belzer and Pickard identified five characterizations: “the Heroic Victim, the Needy (Problem) Child, the Broken (but Repairable) Cog, the Pawn of Destiny, and the Capable Comrade” (p. 250). Strikingly, the majority of studies included in this analysis positioned adult literacy learners as deficient—either as needy or broken individuals or as pawn-like members of marginalized groups. At least in

the field of adult basic education, it seems as though researchers still frequently describe adult learners through discourses of deficiency.

Such discourses have long roots in adult education. Johnson-Bailey (2006) illustrates how early adult education activities in the African-American community were animated in part by discourses of cultural deprivation. She describes “education for assimilation” as the most common theme to emerge from her study of literature produced through adult education programs for African Americans from 1920 to 1945:

We must be like the previous immigrant groups, we must fit in, and we must not be the White man’s burden. Finding their way to better social skills and better job skills through education was thought of as the trustworthiest way to make it in this land of opportunity. Programs and curricula of the time included offerings on social etiquette, proper speech for formal and informal occasions, hygiene, home-making, budgeting, and literacy. (p. 106)

The idea that African Americans were culturally deprived, and that education could help remedy such deprivation, was prominent in the first half of the 1900s.

Just as African Americans were once positioned as being collectively in need of adult education due to the legacy of institutionalized slavery, so were labourers in the United Kingdom positioned as collectively deprived due to the nature of the social class system in that country. Beginning in 1903, the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) provided educational opportunities for adults who did not otherwise have access to such opportunities. The WEA (1968) was founded to address problems of “the educationally underprivileged”:

The Workers’ Educational Association came into existence very largely to cater for the requirements of those deprived of educational opportunity by the inadequacies of the schools and further education system as it then was. It was clearly understood that inequality of educational opportunity was closely related to the division of society into social classes. (p. 7)

The WEA did not argue that there was anything inherently deficient about working class people; rather, it argued that structural inequalities of educational opportunity left members of the working class deprived in terms of educational access and attainment. It claimed that class-based inequalities in educational systems left “an enormous remedial

task” for adult education in alleviating “grave social and educational deficiencies” (pp. 7–8).

In more recent decades, collective deficiencies, such as those engendered by slavery and social class oppression, have been infrequently identified as a rationale for adult education. However, rather than disappear, the logic of deficiency has persevered in the form of deficits putatively held by individual learners. The orthodoxy of this individualization of inadequacy was summarized by Boggs (1974):

The purposes of adult basic education, however, are usually phrased in terms of personal development and of adjustment of marginal individuals to the configurations of the dominant way of life. The goal is to render the student fit and able to participate in the structures and institutions of society, thereby reaping a share in the benefits of the good life. (p. 309)

Boggs emphasized the way in which individual learners with marginalized backgrounds were positioned as deficient: “adult basic education has generally placed the lower class client in the position of object, to be repaired, retreaded, and reformed” (p. 310).

Contradictions inherent to discourses grounded in individualized conceptualizations of deficiency were poignantly illustrated in Valadez’s (2000) study of “a group of rural African American women [who] entered a community college work education program to seek the skills they needed to escape the welfare rolls and to prepare them for jobs in their community” (p. 213). Valadez summarized the contradictions present in messages transmitted from the college to its students:

There was the unrelenting ideological message that the students were being prepared to become contributing members of society. There were consistent reminders that welfare recipients were losers and were less than those people who worked for a living. What the students were not told, however, was that the jobs they were being prepared for would not pull them out of poverty but would assure them of entering the class of working poor. (p. 225)

No matter how successful these women were in improving their self-confidence, work ethic, communication skills, and so forth, the absence of well-paying jobs in their region meant that their investment in adult education would not likely lift them out of poverty. Valadez concluded with an observation about the psychological costs sometimes

associated with educational programs grounded in individualized discourses of deficiency: “The unsettling finding of this study is that these women are more likely to find fault with themselves than with the educational system that continues to fail them” (p. 229). Given such costs, and given the preponderance of discourses of deficiency in adult education—particularly the forms of adult education in which people with marginalized backgrounds tend to participate—it is important for educators to understand how such discourses are deployed. Through providing a detailed genealogy of deficiency in one particular region—a region characterized by a relatively small population and a relatively small number of providers of educational programs—this article aids the understanding of the deployment of deficiency discourses in a range of other educational contexts.

## **Research Methods**

This history of official Canadian discourses concerning Inuit adult education is based primarily upon original research conducted at the Public Archives of Canada. Over a period of six months, I systematically reviewed archival records pertaining to the history of the Canadian government’s colonization of Arctic territories, with a special focus on the domains of adult education and children’s schooling. Documentary records from the early 1900s through the 1970s were photocopied and later analyzed thematically. The periodization, presented below, of official discourses into three broad eras resulted from an inductive interpretation of archival materials. Note that published reports from various government agencies are cited in the text and included in the list of references, while unpublished materials are cited in the text with the following standard structure to identify the location of documents in the Public Archives of Canada: Record Group (RG), volume (v.), file (f.), part (pt.).

My data collection was not restricted to official sources of information. Rather, given my interest in both official discourses and their contestation, I spent several weeks collecting documents at the Canadian Circumpolar Institute (CCI) at the University of Alberta. The CCI no longer exists, but at the time of my research it housed a large collection of documents on Northern Canada and the circumpolar world. In this collection, I found numerous documents, from various sources and points in time, which were highly critical of the Canadian government’s policies, programs, and practices in the Arctic. Since

documents retrieved from the CCI were all of a published nature, they are identified in the list of references below.

Thematic analysis was influenced by two key elements of my subjective position as a researcher: my prior experiences working for nearly four years as an adult educator in two Inuit communities; and my reading, as a PhD student in sociology, of theoretical and empirical work inspired by figures such as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Norbert Elias. For purposes of this article, Foucault's thoughts regarding genealogy and discourse influenced my methodology.

In everyday terms, a genealogy is “an account of the origin and historical development of something” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genealogy>). This definition aptly describes my research intentions: to go back to the origins of official concern with the education of Inuit adults in order to explain how discourses of deficiency were invented, selected, deployed, and adapted. I found methodological inspiration in the work of Michel Foucault, who distinguishes genealogical work from other forms of writing history. For purposes of this article, two aspects of Foucault's conceptualization of genealogy are particularly important. First, Foucault (1984) contends:

If the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. (p. 78)

A genealogical approach draws attention to the political and socially-constructed nature of all claims to knowledge, rejecting the notion that ideas or ideals somehow evolve on their own or according to an inherently progressive logic. Second, Foucault (1984) argues:

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents,

the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us. (p. 81)

Genealogical analysis allows one to recognize the arbitrary and changing nature of historical processes that are sometimes interpreted as normal and universal.

My research for this article examined official discourses about the relationship between Inuit, adult education, and modernity. The concept of discourse represents “a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discourse>). Once again, Foucault’s work helped inspire my approach to the analysis of discourse. Foucault’s key insight in this respect was to link discourse with power. He used the term “regime of truth” (1980, p. 131) to explain how various types of discourses gain credence in various social contexts, and argued that “truth” was “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (p. 133). Thus, rather than seek some universal truth about the relationship between Inuit, adult education, and modernity, my analysis focused on interpreting various claims to truth (both official and oppositional) about this relationship, and elaborating connections between such claims and the broader relations of power that underpinned and were supported by such claims.

While my use of the terms “Inuit” and “adult education” require no introduction for readers of the *Canadian Journal of Education*, I conclude this section with a brief reflection on the concept of “modernity.” It is important to note that the notion of “postmodernity” was unknown to most of the authors of the documents I analyzed for this article, and as such “modernity” simply reflected, for those authors, those contemporary characteristics which separated “modern” societies from “traditional” ones. Such characteristics varied over the period of time covered by my research, but would have included such things as industrial production, urban life, wage labour, science and technology, mass media, mass schooling, bureaucratic organization of large institutions, and the rational forms of subjectivity that enable human beings to thrive within such modern circumstances.

## Historical Context

The focus of this article is on the history of statements made by Canadian bureaucrats, politicians, and educators to develop and defend policies and programs for the education of Inuit adults. I argue that the evolution of official Canadian discourses regarding Inuit adult education evolved through three distinct eras, and that such an evolution reflected a rapidly changing political-economic context rather than a progressive construction of better ideas. To place these discourses in context, readers need a basic understanding of the evolution of adult education in the Canadian Arctic. Discourses of adult education were closely linked to the evolution of educational structures and practices, and the evolution of such structures and practices was closely linked to the process of establishing Euro-Canadian colonial rule in the Arctic.

The Arctic is an enormous region, and there is substantial variability in the cultures and histories of various groups of Inuit. Despite such variability, Inuit across most of the Canadian Arctic were incorporated into relationships with Euro-Canadians through relatively similar stages. For hundreds of years, Inuit lived in small, semi-nomadic groups, and secured their livelihoods through annual cycles of subsistence activities that included hunting seals, caribou, and fish. European exploration in the Canadian Arctic took place from the 1500s through the early 1900s, and while some economic exchange took place with whalers beginning in the 1700s, many Inuit groups remained relatively isolated from Europeans until the expansion of fur trading across the Arctic in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the first half of the twentieth century, Inuit life was transformed through interaction with Euro-Canadian fur traders. Inuit discarded their traditional subsistence practices in favour of trapping and trading fox furs in exchange for goods such as guns, boats with outboard motors, fishing nets, and metal implements such as knives and sewing needles. Unfortunately for the Inuit, the market price for furs deteriorated drastically in the 1930s and 1940s, and facing serious hardship, most Inuit moved into permanent settlements constructed by the Canadian government in the 1950s and 1960s. Since that time, Inuit subsistence has depended primarily upon government transfer payments and subsidies, and Canadian governments, through the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and since 1999 through the Government of Nunavut, have established administrative systems to govern domains such as health care, education, social services, criminal justice, transportation, employment, and economic development.

In the centuries preceding Euro-Canadian contact, formal institutions of schooling did not exist in the Arctic. Adults learned new knowledge and skills from observation, experimentation, and informal instruction. During the fur trade era, Euro-Canadian traders, missionaries, and police officers typically selected a few Inuit to train as clerks, catechists, housekeepers, or general assistants (Keenleyside, 1966). Some missionaries engaged in formal educational activities with schoolchildren, and some received modest government grants for doing so, but no state support was provided for the education of Inuit over the age of 17 (RG 85, v. 1506, f. 60-1-1, pt. 6).

Prior to 1949, the Canadian government was not directly engaged in the provision of education in the Arctic. With the collapse of the fur trade economy, and with growing concern about asserting Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, government activity expanded substantially in the post-war era. Between 1944 and 1950, the Canadian government commissioned three major reports, and created two special committees, to study and govern education for the Inuit. All three studies surveyed the educational practices of missionaries, and recommended the development of a state-organized education system. These initiatives signalled the beginning of direct state involvement in Inuit schooling, and the first federal day schools in the Arctic opened in 1949.

State-organized adult education for Inuit emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, in conjunction with the operation of federal day schools. In 1948, the NWT Deputy Commissioner claimed that adult education was being planned as an integral component of the public school system: “The whole educational program is being drawn up with the aim in view that the adult population may share in special radio programs, film showings, sport activities, handicrafts, clubs of various types, and night school instruction” (RG 22, v. 871, f. 40-10-4, pt. 1). In the 1950s, Inuit adult education was not administratively distinct from the school system, and full-time adult educators were not employed. However, teachers employed by federal day schools did engage in adult educational activities. In 1951, “Welfare Teachers” employed across the Arctic were “called upon to give particular attention to appropriate measures for adult education through encouraging the study of English, reading, sanitation, hygiene, handicrafts, and various worthwhile community activities” (RG 85, v. 1506, f. 600-1-1, pt. 3). However, in most communities, formal adult education did not become commonplace until after the creation of specific administrative structures, and the hiring of dedicated instructional staff, in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1960, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNANR) established an Adult Education Section in its Education Division. However, from 1960 to 1963, the Adult Education Section had only one staff position to administer programs for the entire NWT. Administrative responsibility for the Arctic was shifted from the DNANR to the newly formed Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) in 1965. That same year, the first major adult education program for Inuit was launched; the Support Program for Eskimo Rental Housing was designed to teach formerly nomadic Inuit how to live in permanent dwellings (Canada, DIAND, 1966, p. 19).

In 1970, responsibility for adult education in the Arctic was transferred from DIAND in Ottawa to the GNWT in Yellowknife. The NWT Department of Education administered Arctic adult education, initially through a Continuing and Special Education Division (CASE). In the mid-1970s, CASE dramatically expanded the actual practice of adult education in the NWT, by hiring 31 Community Adult Educators and 7 Home Management Coordinators. Adult education had become a significant field of practice in the Arctic—a field which further expanded with the establishment of Arctic College in 1987.

Between the 1940s and the 1980s, the role of the Canadian government in the education of Inuit adults changed from doing almost nothing to creating a significant infrastructure of buildings, institutions, policies, staff positions, and curricular materials. How did representatives of Canadian governments conceptualize and legitimate this dramatic transformation? The next sections of this article narrate the evolution of official discourses which, from a very different point of departure, positioned Inuit adults as deficient.

## Findings

### **Mobilizing Cultural Deprivation Discourses: An Ironic Reversal of Esteem**

Notions of deficiency did not characterize official descriptions of the Inuit in the years prior to 1945. Rather, statements by representatives of Canadian governments frequently idealized the Inuit. For example, the 1943 annual report of the department responsible for the Arctic contained the following passage:

For generations the Eskimos of Canada have wrested a living, mated, and reared a family in a country where only a hardy and intelligent race could survive. They are slowly assimilating a certain amount of civilization while still retaining their independence, pride, and ability to care for themselves...For a number of years the Government of Canada has been paying special attention to its Arctic citizens, in order to keep them independent, self-reliant, and self-supporting, and with this object in view has put forth continuous and unremitting efforts to preserve the natural resources of the country so that the Eskimos may continue to be the admirable race of people they now are. (Canada, Department of Mines and Resources, 1943, p. 18)

Several aspects of this passage are noteworthy. First, Inuit were conceptualized in collective terms; these were not abstract, individual citizens, but rather members of a “race” that constituted a separate category of citizens. Second, nobility rather than deficiency characterized Inuit culture; Inuit were seen as hardy, intelligent, independent, proud, self-reliant, and admirable. Third, the role of the Canadian government was limited to preserving natural resources so that Inuit could continue living on the land; notions of educating the Inuit were simply absent. Fourth, this passage communicated an acceptance, on the part of Canadian governments, that remaining outside of “civilization” was a feasible and even praiseworthy option for the Inuit.

This passage was not an isolated or unusual characterization of Inuit by representatives of Canadian governments prior to 1945. Rather, it reflected widespread conviction, expressed in numerous official reports and administrative memoranda, that Canadian governments should minimize spending on Inuit affairs by encouraging the Inuit to continue to live as semi-nomadic hunters and trappers (Diubaldo, 1989; McLean, 1995). In terms of a genealogy of deficiency in adult education, the years prior to 1945 represented an era in which the provision of education to remedy deficiencies was simply not part of official discourses.

The establishment of adult education in the Canadian Arctic was facilitated by the discursive reconceptualization of the relationship between Inuit, modernity, and education. The first step in this process was to re-position Inuit within “civilized” forms of social life. J. Jacobson, the DNANR Superintendent of Education, wrote in 1953:

Civilization is now advancing into the Arctic areas at such a rapid pace that it is impossible for the Eskimo not to be affected. It is therefore essential that they should be assisted in every possible way to face the future in a realistic manner and in a way which will result in their becoming true Canadian citizens while at the same time maintaining their racial pride and independence of spirit. (RG 22, v. 805, f. 40-8-9, pt. 1)

It is important to note that the notion of deficiency was still absent from official discourses. Inuit were still conceptualized as a proud and independent “race”—simply one that needed assistance to adapt to the incursions of the modern world.

The second step in the discursive construction of Inuit adult education was to position adult education as a means through which the Canadian government could assist the Inuit in their collective adaptation to modernity. This step was accomplished in policy in the mid-1950s, although it was another decade before such discourse was accompanied by significant educational programming. The DNANR reported:

Definite plans are now under way to educate and give technical training to Eskimos interested in and capable of taking advantage of increasing opportunities for employment in the Arctic and elsewhere. A roster is being prepared of all male Eskimos between 10 years and 30 years of age and this will be used as a basis for setting up educational and training programs for selecting employable Eskimos... While progress in dealing with a primitive people must necessarily be slow, the steps that are now being taken to diversify the economy and to provide education and technical training will in time provide those who must remain as hunters and trappers with a higher standard of living and those others, who are so inclined, with opportunities for taking up other forms of gainful employment. (Canada, DNANR, 1954, p. 27)

This passage is noteworthy because it begins to conceptualize Inuit as deficient. As a people, they were “primitive” and as individuals only some of them were “employable.” The formation of “definite plans” for educational and training programs represented a dramatic reversal for the Canadian government.

In the early 1960s, leaders of vocational and adult education for the Canadian Arctic grounded state organized adult education for Inuit in assumptions of cultural deprivation. T. Taylor, DNANR Superintendent of Vocational Education, wrote:

Here are 20,000 hopes and fears, loves and hates, joys and sorrows and the struggle of souls tossed between the ice ages and the twentieth century...the tidal wave of this Atomic Age threatens to sweep our northern citizens from their ancient moorings. There is danger lest they fall into those gaping fissures where lie rotting the flotsam and jetsam of society...Techniques are needed with which to assist our Indians and Eskimos to cross that treacherous gulf by which they and we are separated. (1960, p. 268)

Taylor (1960) identified adult education as a key means through which Euro-Canadians could help “these primitive peoples in cultural transition” (p. 269).

Frances McKay, the first Section Head of the DNANR Adult Education Section, wrote:

Social change is, without doubt, moving at a challenging pace in northern Canada. The majority of Indian, Eskimo, and Metis adults are without the schooling that gives other Canadian citizens a normal background to meet daily situations, to make decisions based on schooled experience and judgement, and to adapt or adjust to their swiftly changing environment. (1964, p. 55)

McKay and Taylor established the basic parameters of cultural deprivation discourse, which came to dominate official accounts of Inuit adult education in the 1960s. Inuit were viewed in collective, not individual terms. Deficiencies in Inuit culture were not the fault of Inuit themselves, but rather the reflection of massive social change and the historical absence of schooling for children. Adult education was positioned as a means to compensate for the absence of a “normal background” among the Inuit.

The DNANR provided an explicit statement of the role of adult education in alleviating cultural deprivation:

Many Indian, Eskimo, and Metis adults lack the normal educational background which allows other people to relate change to their situations. To provide an educational program which will compensate for this deficiency in their lives is an

immense, but not impossible task... Because of the rapidity with which change is taking place in the north an adult education program geared to this change, timed so as to prepare the people for it, and carried out in conjunction with the change, is required. (Canada, DNANR, 1964, p. 35)

In the 1960s, Canadian governments reported regularly upon progress in the construction of adult education programs designed to address the cultural deprivation that hindered Inuit modernization.

### **Individualizing Deficiency: Meeting Learning Needs**

In 1968, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Arthur Laing signalled an important transition in the Canadian government's approach to Inuit education. Laing (1968) initially deployed cultural deprivation discourse:

The Indian and Eskimo people have learned the ways of the bush, of the North and of the wildlife upon which they depended, usually from within their family. Now that the modern world has broken into their ancient solitude, they require a different kind of training. (p. 10)

However, Laing went on to discuss a very different rationale for adult education:

They need to be given the educational equipment so that they choose for themselves, as free individuals, what sort and kind of life they wish to lead. If they are to be given a reasonable choice of options, they must be so equipped that one of the choices they can make is to take advantage of the Canadian economy and make a living from it. (p. 10)

By referring to "free individuals" and a "choice of options," Laing opened the door to a fundamentally different way of conceptualizing adult education. Abstract individuals, rather than collectivities defined by particular social contexts, would be the targets of Arctic adult education.

A subsequent DIAND minister, Jean Chrétien, decisively moved official Canadian discourse regarding Inuit adult education away from notions of cultural deprivation and toward the notion of the inadequate individual. In outlining the Canadian government's

priorities and strategies regarding the Arctic, Chrétien (1973) answered the rhetorical question, “What is to become of the native peoples of the North?”

Perhaps the most important need in approaching such questions is to get rid of myths about the Eskimos (“Eskimos want to continue their traditional nomad life”; “they can be insulated from the new influences at work in the North”; “they are unable to adapt to life in the South,” etc.). Some Eskimos have shown a keen interest in the material aspects of modern society and an eagerness to adapt themselves to it. The real need is to concentrate on means of enhancing the Eskimos’ self-respect and livelihood, especially through diversified education and vocational training and fundamentally to give them mobility and freedom of choice. (p. 31)

This passage reflected several innovations in the official conceptualization of the relationship among Inuit, modernity, and adult education. It explicitly abandoned ideas about the unchanging and uniform nature of Inuit culture. Instead, Inuit were positioned as individuals, willing and able to be modern. In this context, the Canadian government’s role was to provide education and training opportunities that would enhance Inuit individuals’ ability to freely choose how they wanted to live. The notion of “freedom of choice” represented a break with assumptions about Inuit as members of a closed and culturally specific group, and the launch of an individualized conception of deficiency—since most Inuit individuals lacked the education and training required to successfully function in modern society.

The role of adult education in meeting individuals’ learning needs was clarified by Echo Lidster, NWT Supervisor of Adult Programs. Lidster (1978) argued:

Citizens of the Northwest Territories have learning needs that must be met in order for them to function in a changing society; it is therefore imperative that learning opportunities be made available for individuals in order to provide them with information and skills enabling them to cope with change and make choices affecting their lives. (p. 5)

Social change provided the context for adult education in the Arctic: “The continuous onward march of the industrial age throughout the world renders inadequate many skills that were formerly quite adequate in a more slowly changing society” (Lidster, 1975, p.

7). Given the inescapable reality of social change, Lidster (1975) stated that the GNWT was helping individuals adjust:

Through programs tailored to meet the needs of adults, the Department of Education is striving to help people to understand and to mold the changes to their situation. These programs are intended to open people's minds to their own possibilities for development. They are intended to help people gain self-confidence, to express and to acquire skills, and to bring to fruition ideas which they have for maintaining and improving the quality of daily life. (pp. 7–8)

This passage clearly illustrates an individualization of inadequacy. Modernization was still the overarching rationale for the provision of adult education programs. However, the adaptation to modernity was no longer to be accomplished by shifting the collective characteristics of Inuit; modernization was to be accomplished by remolding individuals, one by one.

Throughout the 1970s, official statements regarding the purpose of adult education grounded policy, programs, and practices in remedying individual deficiencies. The NWT Department of Education (1972) defined the “Purpose of Education” as:

To provide for all people opportunity for maximum development of their aptitudes, skills and competencies along with an understanding and appreciation of the sum total of human experience. Such development should enable each individual to choose freely between different courses of action in such a manner that he can live a satisfying personal life while discharging his responsibilities as a participating member of a complex society. (p. 8)

Just six years later, the NWT Department of Education (1978) claimed that “Continuing Education”

...includes the entire educational process whereby persons not attending the school program on a full-time basis may develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications, or turn themselves in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior. (p. 22)

Individuals, not social collectivities, were the focus of Arctic adult education in the 1970s.

The emphasis on meeting individuals' needs continued to characterize official discourses of adult education through the 1980s. The NWT Department of Education (1987) claimed that "the purpose of adult education is to help people adjust to a rapidly changing North" (p. 24). Such adjustments were to be facilitated in personalized ways:

Some people need help with practical things: how to write a cheque, how to manage money, the principles of good nutrition, or how to run a house in town, complete with appliances. Others need help with life skills: developing the personal strength to cope with the social changes around them; developing the self-confidence to handle a job interview, and eventually a new job. Still others need to acquire the skills to qualify for trades or apprenticeship programs... Adult education programs have been developed to respond to all of these needs. (p. 24)

This statement illustrates a dramatic shift from the 1950s to the 1980s. Initially, Inuit were officially positioned as being culturally deprived, and adult education was presented as a benevolent form of intervention that would lessen this deprivation and facilitate Inuit modernization. Later, explicitly assimilationist discourses were replaced by a more subtle claim: in the modern world, every individual, irrespective of social context, had inherent learning needs that required fulfillment. Adult education was positioned as a means for individuals to identify and meet such learning needs. Of course, the notion of deficit remained implicit in this seemingly neutral message: individuals, rather than collectivities, were now in need of fixing.

### **Making Sense of Genealogy: Discourse as Contested and Strategic**

There is a tendency, among policy makers and politicians, to present the evolution of educational discourse as a progressive unfolding of truth over time. In the interpretation of the evolution of official Canadian discourses concerning Inuit adult education, it is tempting to conclude that justifying educational practice on the grounds of cultural deprivation was better than denying others access to education, or that meeting the learning needs of individuals represented a better rationale for adult education than alleviating the putative shortcomings of cultural groups. However, such an interpretation would ignore the fact

that official discourse, in each era, was met with significant criticism from people familiar with Inuit life.

During the years in which official Canadian discourses excluded Inuit from the realm of adult education, some people did advocate for the provision of education and training to Inuit adults. In 1925, anthropologist Diamond Jenness submitted a proposal concerning “Vocational Training of the Eskimos” to the NWT Council. Jenness asserted:

Conditions in the Arctic are changing rapidly. Within the last ten years fur traders and police have extended to every inhabited corner, and although little except furs are now exported, other developments, such as mining, may follow in the not distant future. The Eskimos, the only natives in the region, are changing also. Rifles have replaced their bows and arrows, and tools of iron their old implements of horn, bone and ivory. But with no knowledge of the outside world, with no education or training except what they can acquire from a rare missionary, or from association with traders and police, they are ill-adapted to meet the changed conditions, to assist in the development of their country, or to aid in its exploration and exploitation. They can trap white foxes and barter the furs at a trading post, but they can initiate no industry, and supply no skilled labour for any industry that may one day arise. Yet the future of Arctic Canada rests entirely with the Eskimos, for no other people will live there permanently. With training and guidance from Europeans, they have greatly enhanced the value of Greenland and Alaska to the nations that own those countries, and with similar guidance they could develop our own Arctic domain. But their training should commence immediately, to enable them to breast the changed economic conditions and inaugurate a new and more prosperous era. (RG 85, v. 57 1, f. 244, pt. 1)

Jenness proposed vocational training programs in naval navigation, mechanics, carpentry, metal-working, health care, and wireless telegraphy. However, his proposal was rejected, having been criticized as impractical, expensive, and unnecessary (RG 85, v. 1130, f. 254-1, pt. 1).

During the deployment of cultural deprivation discourses of Inuit adult education, missionaries opposed the assimilationist policies of the Canadian government. Piché (1959) ridiculed the ethnocentrism of Canadian state representatives:

Many have the Eskimo's good at heart, but hold that he must give up his language and become a "full-fledged white man." Such intransigence betrays an unwillingness to understand the Eskimo and to admit that any other culture is adequate but one's own. Anyone who asserts that the Eskimo has no culture or anything worth retaining, ignores the Eskimo's calmness in trial, his honesty, his reserve, his decency, his love for family and children, his respect for paternal authority, his hospitality, and his sense of common welfare. These qualities are certainly worth preserving... Instead of trying to remold all Eskimos in our own image, we should seek to guarantee them, in practice, the real freedom which is his under the law. Only in this manner will he maintain his self-respect, his dignity, and his pride in being Eskimo and take his place in the nation. (p. 9)

Missionary opposition to cultural deprivation discourses was not restricted to identifying the noble qualities of the Inuit. Rather, missionary publications (Renaud, 1963) identified specific proposals for Inuit education, proposals that decades later had become central to the claims of Inuit activists and educators: Inuktitut should be the language of instruction; Inuit should govern their own schools; and curricula and learning materials should be more relevant for Inuit culture (McGregor, 2012; Rasmussen, 2009).

Critical educators and missionaries also contested the deployment of deficit learner discourses. David Keenleyside, a former "Community Teacher" in the Eastern Arctic, directly refuted the official claim that adult education was a means to prepare Inuit to freely choose between traditional and modern lifestyles. He (1968) argued:

For behind the proclamation that education means freedom lies the truth—the vast majority of adult Eskimos are merely trained to fill local gaps in the southern-style economy being introduced by southerners into the north. Thus the indigenous population acquires marginal status, living on the fringe of two worlds. (p. 212)

Keenleyside criticized both the poor quality of adult education programs in the Arctic, and the focus of existing programs on preparing Inuit for menial jobs.

Such contestation of official discourses about the role of adult education was also present in criticism by missionaries of the school system. Lechat (1975) raged:

With a great deal of money and publicity, the flowery school train has travelled across the frozen immensity. It has reached its remotest points. It has been loaded

with Inuit children, more or less arbitrarily, in first-class coaches, with the perspective of a marvelous trip. Just think, this school train was to bring them to...a land where employment, trade, profession, and all that follows—abundance, money, luxuries, comfort—would be within reach for them. But, in fact, when a child has spent five, seven, ten, twelve years in school and thinks of getting out, he finds himself in a desert. Not in the promised and boosted land of plenty, but in a dry country, without water, I mean in a country without jobs. For many, the end of schooling is even worse: it is the abyss of delinquency. The educated one knows no longer how to live in a country where there are no jobs, no work. (p. 5)

Lechat criticized Canadian government discourses and policies as unrealistic; since employment opportunities were scarce in the Arctic, it seemed absurd to educate Inuit so that they could better access wage employment.

Such contestation suggests that the evolution of official Canadian discourses regarding Inuit adult education was not simply a teleological unfolding of truth, or the progressive construction of better ideas. To better understand this evolution, we need to remember that official discourses are shaped and deployed by people with strategic intentions. State representatives have multiple sources and varieties of ideas available to them; they select, adapt, and mobilize those that best fit their priorities. In this case study, there is a transparent connection between discourses deployed by representatives of the Canadian government, and the shifting forms of rule that those representatives were striving to construct in the context of dramatic political-economic change. In other words, there was a clear correspondence between the ideas expressed by state representatives, and the strategic interests of those representatives in changing the relations of governance between Canada and the Inuit.

Ideas relating to cultural deprivation and individual learning needs were not invented by Canadian officials engaged in governing Inuit adult education. Rather, such ideas had already been mobilized in other contexts, of which representatives of Canadian governments would have been aware. Given that ideas of cultural deprivation and individual deficits were available for inclusion in official discourses throughout much of the post-war era, why did Canadian discourses about Inuit adult education evolve in such a dramatic manner? The answer lies in major shifts in the approach of Canadian

governments to the governance of Inuit, shifts that were themselves driven by political-economic developments.

Connections between political-economy, models of governance, and discourses of adult education are clear in this case study. Prior to 1945, official discourses excluded Inuit from participation in adult education mainly because the Canadian state did not have significant institutions of governance in most of the Canadian Arctic. Fur traders and missionaries were the most common Euro-Canadians in Arctic posts, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers were virtually the only direct state representatives to have a sustained presence in the North. As Jenness's proposal indicated, state-organized adult education for Inuit was conceivable in the 1920s. However, such education was not really possible until the institutional expansion of the Canadian government into the Arctic following 1945.

In the post-war era, Canadian governments became more active in Inuit affairs. The emergence of discourses and practices incorporating Inuit into the domain of adult education was part of a much broader incorporation of the Inuit into Euro-Canadian rule. Inuit were settled into permanent communities, and encouraged to find wage employment as an alternative source of income, given the collapse of the market for furs. In the 1950s and 1960s, discourses of cultural deprivation were deployed to legitimate adult education activities, since such discourses were well-known from other jurisdictions, and since Inuit were being governed as communities in transition, rather than as individual citizens.

In the 1970s, two important changes drove representatives of Canadian governments to shift discourses of deficiency from collective to individual terms. First, numerous state-organized fields of intervention were constructed, in fields such as health, welfare, employment, justice, and children's schooling. The cumulative outcome of such intervention was to transform the nature of the relationship between Inuit and the Canadian state; rather than being citizens with a symbolic and collective importance for Canadian sovereignty, Inuit became citizens whose activities were monitored and documented on an individual level. This individualization of governance in the Arctic was furthered by two interventions that made it possible for Canadian governments to identify individual Inuit: the "disk number" registration system initiated in the 1940s, and "Project Surname" undertaken from 1968 through the early 1970s (Bonesteel, 2006). The institutional and administrative individualization of the Canadian government's relationship with the Inuit was reflected in the choice of ideas that state representatives deployed in their

discourses regarding adult education. Second, the civil rights movement and decolonization experiences around the world had led discourses of cultural deprivation to become politically incorrect and scientifically discredited (Baratz & Baratz, 1970; Ryan, 1971). With Inuit relating to the Canadian state as individual citizens, and with cultural deprivation discourse being contested, representatives of Canadian governments deployed ideas about individual learning needs to legitimate adult education in the Arctic.

## Conclusions

In this article, I have made two contributions to the scholarship of education. First, I have narrated an original and interesting chapter in the history of adult education in Canada. The empirical contribution of this article has been to address an important silence in the history of Inuit education. Second, I have interpreted the evolution of discourses of deficiency in a manner that has implications for the understanding of education in a range of other contexts involving marginalized people. The analytical contribution of this article has been to problematize how adult education has been viewed, and to change how adult education could be viewed.

From the 1940s to the 1980s there were substantial transformations of official discourses on the relationship between Inuit, adult education and modernity. Prior to 1945, Inuit were positioned as collectively destined to remain outside the realm of modernity, and excluded from the domain of adult education. In the 1950s and 1960s, both adult education and Inuit modernization were seen as explicitly collective and problematic processes. The notion of cultural deprivation captures the essence of official discourses: in the process of modernization, Inuit were positioned as culturally deprived. Adult education was presented as a means to alleviate this collective deficiency. In the 1970s and 1980s, three major changes took place in official discourses on the relationship between Inuit, adult education, and modernity. First, there was a decline in explicit references to any sort of collective Inuit transition. Second, notions of individual growth, choice, and satisfaction became prominent. Third, modernity became a taken-for-granted component of the Arctic landscape. As a result, adult education was no longer presented as a means to facilitate Inuit modernization; instead, adult education was seen as a means for individuals to meet their learning needs, and develop their inherent capacities for modern life.

Modernization still provided the background for education in the Canadian Arctic, but becoming modern was portrayed as a natural and individual process. Adult education's rationale changed from alleviating cultural deprivation, to fulfilling the needs of deficient learners.

In terms of genealogy, the basic stages (exclusion, cultural deprivation, and individualization) of deficiency discourse in Inuit adult education bear a striking resemblance to the history of discourses deployed to position adult education in other contexts involving marginalized people. There are at least three important hypotheses generated by this case study of Inuit adult education that should provoke reflection among those interested in other contexts. First, official discourses evolve not because of some sort of inherent logic whereby "better" ideas emerge and gain prominence over time, but rather due to choices made by agents within parameters set by broader political-economic and ideological changes. Second, discourses in various places and times are connected by the fact that agents learn about discourses deployed elsewhere, and import ideas as warranted by circumstances and priorities. Third, despite the resiliency of deficiency discourses in adult education, such discourses may be contested and displaced.

By understanding how discourses of deficiency emerge and evolve over time, it is easier to recognize their arbitrariness, and imagine alternatives that position education in terms other than those of the alleviation of the putative inadequacies of learners. While my study of Inuit adult education offers an interesting case study, further research is needed in order to document how discourses of deficiency were deployed in the education of other marginalized populations. Further research is also needed to assess the gendered nature of deficiency discourses, and the distinctive deployment of such discourses in the education of women. While my analysis of official Canadian discourse offers some initial ideas, further work is needed in order to demonstrate, in other empirical contexts, linkages between educational discourses, political-economic change, and models of governance.

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